



Fully vaccinated people can gather without masks, CDC says

By MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Fully vaccinated Americans can gather with other vaccinated people indoors without wearing a mask or social distancing, according to long-awaited guidance from federal health officials. The recommendations also say that vaccinated people can come together in the same way — in a single household — with people considered at low-risk for severe disease, such as in the case of vaccinated grandparents visiting healthy children and grandchildren.

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Medical Assistant Keona Shepard holds up the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine as she prepares to administer it at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center during the mass coronavirus vaccination in New Orleans, in this Thursday, March 4, 2021, file photo.

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Fully vaccinated people can gather without masks, CDC says

Continued from Front

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the guidance Monday.

The guidance is designed to address a growing demand, as more adults have been getting vaccinated and wondering if it gives them greater freedom to visit family members, travel, or do other things like they did before the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world last year.

"With more and more people vaccinated each day, we are starting to turn a corner," said CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky.

During a press briefing Monday, she called the guidance a "first step" toward restoring normalcy in how people come together. She said more activities would be ok'd for vaccinated individuals once caseloads and deaths decline, more Americans are vaccinated, and as more science emerges on the ability of those who have been vaccinated to get and spread the virus.

The CDC is continuing to recommend that fully vaccinated people still wear well-fitted masks, avoid large gatherings, and physically distance themselves from others when out in public. The CDC also advised vaccinated people to get tested if they develop symptoms that could be related to COVID-19.

The CDC guidance did not speak to people who may have gained some level of immunity from being infected, and recovering from, the coronavirus.

Officials say a person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the last required dose of vaccine. About 31 million Americans — or only about 9% of the U.S. population —



President Joe Biden, standing left, visits a COVID-19 vaccination site and watches as Dr. Navjit Goraya gives a vaccine to Air Force Col. Margaret Cope, as from left, Pharmacist Deepika Duggineni, White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Jeff Zients and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough, right, look on at the VA Medical Center in Washington, Monday, March 8, 2021.

Associated Press

have been fully vaccinated with a federally authorized COVID-19 vaccine so far, according to the CDC. Authorized vaccine doses first became available in December, and they were products that required two doses spaced weeks apart. But since January, a small but growing number of Americans have been fully vaccinated, and have been asking questions like: Do I still have to wear a mask? Can I go to a bar now? Can I finally see my grandchildren?

The guidance was "welcome news to a nation that is understandably tired of the pandemic and longs to safely resume normal activities," said Dr. Richard Besser, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and a former acting director of the CDC.

"I hope that this new guidance provides the momentum for everyone to get vaccinated when they can

and gives states the patience to follow the public health roadmap needed to reopen their economies and communities safely," said Besser, in a statement. But some said the guidance is too cautious.

Dr. Ali Khan, dean of the University of Nebraska College of Public Health, said the guidance is reasonable in many respects — with the exception of travel. The CDC did not change its recommendations on travel, which discourages unnecessary travel and calls for getting tested within a few days of the trip. That could seem confusing to vaccinated people hoping to visit family across the country or abroad.

"They need to relax travel for those vaccinated" and to immediately publish electronic standards for documents that show whether a person is fully vaccinated, said Khan, who formerly was a leading CDC disease detective.

The new guidance also says nothing about going to restaurants or other places, even though governors are lifting restrictions on businesses, said Dr. Leana Wen, an emergency physician and public health professor at George Washington University who formerly was Baltimore's health commissioner.

Wen has said the CDC should have had some kind of post-vaccination guidance ready in January, when some people first began to finish their second doses. And she called the guidance that came out Monday "far too cautious." "The CDC is missing a major opportunity to tie vaccination status with reopening guidance. By coming out with such limited guidance, they are missing the window to influence state and national policy," Wen said, in an email.

But some people who are fully vaccinated were pleased by Monday's

news.

Ruth Michienzi was among those receiving her second and final vaccine dose at a pharmacy inside a Stop and Shop supermarket in Woburn, Massachusetts on Monday morning.

The 91-year-old resident of nearby Burlington said she's fine with having to still wear a facemask in public and follow other safety guidelines even after being fully vaccinated.

But Michienzi also said she's excited to finally be able to take off her mask in front of her three great grandchildren. She's seen them in person since receiving her first shot about a month ago, but has kept her mask on. "I hope they remember me," she said.

A pair of customers, who weren't in line to receive shots, though, openly groused about the continued restrictions and voiced fears that stricter mandates on travel and socializing would follow, even as more are vaccinated.

Grace McShane, 61, of Melrose, also received her second dose Monday at the same supermarket.

She says she qualified for the vaccine because she's high risk, including suffering a heart attack last year. The in-home caregiver said she too was fine with the continued restrictions even after being vaccinated.

"Even if you're vaccinated, it's better to be safe than sorry. This is the new normal. This is part of life and you just have to adapt to it," McShane said.

She said she's looking forward to hugging her three grandchildren without having to wear a mask. Her grown children have also been vaccinated as essential workers, she said.

"Just cuddle and give them hugs," McShane said. "That's all I want to do." □

U.S. offers residency to Venezuelans and will review sanctions

By BEN FOX

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration said Monday it is offering temporary legal residency to several hundred thousand Venezuelans who fled their country's economic collapse and will review U.S. sanctions intended to isolate the South American nation.

Both measures mark a shift from U.S. policy toward Venezuela under President Donald Trump.

President Joe Biden's administration announced it would grant temporary protected status to Venezuelans already in the United States, allowing an estimated 320,000 people to apply to legally live and work in the country for 18 months.

Trump resisted repeated calls from Republican and Democratic lawmakers, primarily from South Florida, to grant temporary protected status to Venezuelans though he issued an order deferring deportation for a smaller number on his final day in office.

The Trump administration also significantly tightened U.S. economic sanctions on Venezuela, most notably on its crucial oil sector, to try and force President Nicolas Maduro to give up power after an election in 2018 that the United States



Security forces take part in a military drill to mark the eighth death anniversary of President Hugo Chavez in Caracas, Venezuela, late Friday, March 5, 2021.

Associated Press

and other countries believe was fraudulent and illegitimate.

A senior Biden administration official portrayed that as a failed strategy.

"The United States is in no rush to lift sanctions," the official said, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss the policy. "But we need to recognize here that unilateral sanctions over the last four years have not succeeded in achieving an electoral outcome in the country."

U.S. sanctions, which began under President Barack

Obama, have increased economic pressure on the once prosperous country. Its economy was already suffering from mismanagement and the deterioration of its all-important oil industry.

In the last few years, the Venezuelan economy has been in free fall, with widespread shortages of food and medicine and frequent power outages. An estimated 5 million people have fled, mostly to neighboring countries such as Colombia, but many have settled in South Florida.

The Biden official said the Maduro government has "adapted" to the most punishing of the sanctions, against transactions with Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela SA, and the U.S. needs to work with its allies on new strategies.

"Oil markets long ago have adapted to oil sanctions and that they are able to sustain themselves through illicit flows," the official said. "So, really we could keep on with unilateral sanctions and stay in this situation for who knows how long or we

actually could start sitting down with the international community to see how we can actually exert coordinated pressure and set clear expectations for the way forward."

Any easing of sanctions would likely face opposition in Congress, but the granting of temporary protected status for Venezuelans has bipartisan support. Republicans in recent days had urged the Biden administration to formalize Trump's last-minute executive order that deferred deportation for 18 months for more than 145,000 Venezuelans who were at risk of being sent back to their homeland. Temporary protected status is a more formal status that cannot be as easily reversed.

"By using the law to lift the threat of deportation and grant employment authorization, the Biden administration helps hundreds of thousands of families stay safe and earn a living without fear of being returned to Maduro's dangerous and cruel regime," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, a Democrat whose South Florida district is home to one of the largest Venezuelan communities in the U.S. "Donald Trump had four years to do this, but the Republican Party's xenophobia got in the way of doing what is right." □

Jill Biden helps honor women from 15 countries for courage

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE

Associated Press

First lady Jill Biden says nearly two dozen women the State Department honored for their courage made an "intentional decision" to persist and demand justice despite their fear.

The 21 women recognized Monday with the department's International Women of Courage Award included seven from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honors.

The first lady said that the women's stories make it easy to think of them as "mythical heroes or angels

among us" but that they're also humans who want to enjoy life's simple pleasures.

"Some of these women have spent their lives fighting for their cause. Others are just starting out on a journey they didn't ask for," Biden said.

"Some were called to service, and some couldn't escape it," she said.

"They are fighting for their own lives and for their children.

They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't immune

to fear. No one is."

Biden said that in the course of ordinary lives, each of the women made "an extraordinary choice."

"You see, courage isn't really found," she said. "It doesn't conjure away our doubts. It's an intentional decision made."

The ceremony was held virtually and not at the State Department because of the coronavirus pandemic. The 14 living awardees are from Belarus, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Iran, Myanmar, Nepal, Somalia,



In this Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021, file photo, first lady Jill Biden speaks during a visit to the Massey Cancer Center at Virginia Commonwealth University for a discussion about cancer disparities, in Richmond, Va.

Associated Press

Spain, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Venezuela.

"These women made an extraordinary choice, to persist, to demand justice,

to believe that, despite the obstacles and fear they faced, there is a future worth fighting for," Biden said. □

U.S. journalist arrested while covering protest goes on trial

By RYAN J. FOLEY

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — A journalist went on trial Monday on charges stemming from her coverage of a protest against racial injustice in Des Moines last year, after Iowa prosecutors defied international pressure to drop a rare effort to punish a working reporter.

Des Moines Register news reporter Andrea Sahouri, who was pepper-sprayed and jailed while reporting on a clash between protesters and police in May, is charged with failure to disperse and interference with official acts.

If convicted on the simple misdemeanor charges, the 25-year-old Sahouri would be fined hundreds of dollars and have a criminal record. A judge could also sentence her up to 30 days in jail on each count, although that would be unusual. Advocates for journalism and human rights in the U.S. and abroad have pressed Iowa authorities to drop the charges, arguing that Sahouri was simply doing her job by documenting the event. But prosecutors in the office of Polk County Attorney John Sarcone have pressed forward with the case against Sahouri and her former boyfriend, Spenser Robnett, who faces the same charges.



Police officers are shown arresting Des Moines Register reporter Andrea Sahouri after a Black Lives Matter protest she was covering on May 31, 2020, in Des Moines, Iowa, was dispersed by tear gas. Associated Press

The pair are standing trial in a courtroom at Drake University in Des Moines as part of a program for law students. The university is broadcasting the proceedings, which are expected to last two days. Lawyers selected a six-member jury Monday morning, and prosecutors were expected to begin their case in the afternoon.

The U.S. Press Freedom Tracker has not recorded any other trials of working journalists in the country since 2018. Sahouri was among more than 125

reporters detained or arrested during the civil unrest that unfolded across the U.S. in 2020. Thirteen, including Sahouri, still face prosecution although the majority of those arrested were not charged or their charges were dismissed, the group says.

Employees in the Gannett newspaper chain, which owns USA Today, the Register and hundreds of other newspapers, have flooded social media with support for Sahouri in recent days. Columbia Journalism School, where Sahouri

graduated in 2019 before joining the Register, expressed solidarity Monday by promoting the hashtags #StandWithAndrea and #JournalismIsNotACrime.

Sahouri was assigned to cover a May 31 protest at Merle Hay mall, where activists were demanding better treatment for people of color after the death of George Floyd, a Black man who was declared dead after a white officer put his knee on his neck for about nine minutes.

Some protesters threw water bottles and rocks at po-

lice, broke store windows and vandalized a Target store. Police responded by spraying tear gas to disperse a large crowd from an intersection. Sahouri reported the details live on Twitter.

Prosecutor Brecklyn Carey told jurors that body camera footage will show police giving a dispersal order to a crowd that included both defendants around 6:30 p.m. at an intersection outside the mall. Testimony will show that the pair was arrested around 90 minutes later at the same intersection, and that Robnett tried to pull Sahouri away from the officer who arrested them, she said.

Carey urged jurors in an opening statement to keep their "eyes on the ball" and answer only three questions: was there a dispersal order, did the two disperse, and did they pull away from the officer?

But defense lawyer Nicholas Klinefeldt told jurors that the case was about a journalist who was wrongly arrested while doing her job. He said Sahouri was assigned to cover the protest, and Robnett accompanied her for safety reasons. He said the 6:30 p.m. dispersal order was intended only to clear people who were blocking a squad car, and that both complied. □

NYPD posts discipline records, critics say many still hidden

By MICHAEL R. SISAK

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Disciplinary records of New York City police officers are now a matter of public record — but critics say officials are still keeping the vast majority of misconduct hidden.

The NYPD, acting Monday on a recent appeals court decision, posted a long-awaited online database of officer disciplinary histories, as well as decisions from the department's internal disciplinary hearing process.

The 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals last month lifted a temporary restraining order that paused the release of disciplinary records while public safety unions sued to block the city from posting them online.

The lawsuit, filed after state lawmakers last June reversed a law that kept disciplinary records secret for decades, is still pending. The appeals court, in its ruling, said it wouldn't keep the public waiting any longer.

The NYPD's disclosures came days after the city's police watchdog agency, the Civilian Complaint Review Board, posted a database of complaints it's received about officers.

Advocates criticized the NYPD for limiting its disclosures to matters that resulted in a guilty finding by the police commissioner, which they said excluded the vast majority of misconduct and discipline records.

Lumumba Bandele, a spokesperson for Communities United for Police Reform, said the database is "a shameful bait-and-switch" and evidence of the lengths the city "will go to hide police violence and promote fairy tales." Donna Lieberman, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said the NYPD's database "comes nowhere close to including the full universe of misconduct."

"It is a slap in the face to every New Yorker that took to the streets and the polls demanding an end to the secrecy shrouding NYPD abuse," she said.

In response to the criticism, an NYPD spokesperson said: "There is no other agency in city government that provides this breadth or depth of information on their employees accessible to the public."

"It should also be noted that the NYPD dashboard links to outside agencies including the CCRB and the city's Law Department where information outside the scope of what the police department provides can be accessed," the spokesperson, Sgt. Edward Riley, said.

NYPD officials told reporters last week that the public database would only include cases resulting in a finding or plea of guilty, involving active officers. At first, they said, it will include cases dating to 2014 but will grow as time goes on.

The database, which also features officer training histories, promotions and awards, is also limited in functionality. It's only searchable by name and results come up in a small window that's hard to navigate. □

U.S. presents warring Afghan sides with draft peace agreement

By KATHY GANNON

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)

— Frustrated by a stalled peace process and escalating violence, the U.S. has presented an eight-page draft peace agreement to Afghanistan's warring sides for review.

The U.S. told the parties to come to Turkey in the coming weeks ready to move on it, according to Afghans on both sides of the table. The draft was obtained by The Associated Press on Monday. The document outlines the terms of a cease-fire and its enforcement, calls for the protection of the rights of women, children and minorities and envisions a truth and reconciliation commission aimed at healing 42 years of conflict. There was no immediate comment from the United States.

The Taliban received the draft and were reviewing it, said spokesman Mohammad Naeem. There was no immediate comment from Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on the draft proposal or a sternly worded letter from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

In the letter, Blinken said Washington wanted to see progress on peace



In this Feb. 5, 2019, file photo, Afghan politician Fawzia Koofi attends the "intra-Afghan" talks in Moscow, Russia.

talks and mentioned the draft peace agreement, which calls for a new, inclusive government — which Ghani has resisted. In recent speeches, Ghani has said no interim government would be formed "as long as I am alive."

But Blinken was uncompromising in his letter, which was released by Afghanistan's TOLO TV. "I am making this clear to you so that you understand the urgency of my tone regarding

collective work," he wrote. In the letter, Blinken said a May 1 deadline for a final withdrawal of U.S. troops — stipulated in a Taliban-U.S. deal last year — is still on the table. Even with America's \$4 billion in aid to Afghanistan's National Security Forces, a U.S. withdrawal could mean quick territorial gains for the Taliban.

Ghani's first vice president, Amrullah Saleh, said Monday that the president had

received the letter and was unmoved by its contents. He said Ghani was not ready to embrace the secretary of state's accelerated pace toward a settlement. "We are neither concerned about the letter nor has it changed our position," Saleh said. He thanked the U.S. for its sacrifices and financial assistance over the past 20 years but said the Afghan government won't succumb to dictation.

Associated Press

"We will make peace with dignity, but never . . . an imposed peace," he said at a ceremony on the anniversary of the death of a former defense minister. Ghani has been accused by his political opponents of trying to cling to power at all cost.

Fawzia Koofi, one of only four women at the negotiation table in Doha, warned against haste and a May 1 withdrawal of U.S. troops, saying it would cause chaos. She confirmed that all sides had received the U.S.-crafted draft agreement. Blinken's letter proposes a revised plan for a 90-day reduction in violence that would prevent the start of a spring offensive by the Taliban and would be followed by a permanent cease-fire laid out in the draft peace agreement. Both sides would stop fighting within hours of the agreement being signed, according to the draft. The Taliban would remove all its military and military structures from neighboring countries — a reference to Pakistan, where the leadership currently resides. The draft agreement also calls for an independent commission to oversee cease-fire violations. □

Dutch prime minister extends his country's pandemic lockdown

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Monday extended the country's

tough coronavirus lockdown until the end of the month, but he added a note of hope to his message to a pandemic-weary nation by predict-

ing that a "tipping point is coming when the vaccine gains the upper hand over the virus and more will be possible."

Rutte was speaking a week before a parliamentary election in the Netherlands at which he is seeking a fourth term that could make him the longest-serving Dutch leader. The pandemic is casting a long shadow over other issues in the countdown to three days of voting that start on March 15.

Rutte said that the 9 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. curfew that is part of the lockdown will remain in force through the election, when polling stations are open until 9 p.m., but people working at or visiting voting booths

won't be fined for curfew breaches. The government also extended its call for people to avoid all but unavoidable foreign travel until April 15.

In minor tweaks to the lockdown, Rutte said that from March 16 children up to the age of 12 will be allowed to resume swimming lessons and adults will be allowed to play sports together outdoors in groups of no more than four people, up from the current two.

Polls have shown support for the coronavirus lockdown eroding in recent weeks as this nation of 17 million grows tired of shuttered cafes, restaurants, museums and other meeting places.

A group representing nonfood retailers across the country went to court Monday seeking an order allowing them to reopen to the public. Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said that if infection numbers remain stable or decline, the government will consider reopening cafes' outdoor terraces and further opening nonessential shops from March 31, under strict conditions. The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in Netherlands rose over the past two weeks from 23.08 new cases per 100,000 people on Feb. 21 to 26.42 on March 7. Nearly 16,000 people are confirmed to have died of COVID-19 in the country. □



In this file photo dated Saturday, July 18, 2020, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte arrives for an EU summit at the European Council building in Brussels.

Associated Press

Senegal opposition leader released as new clashes erupt

By **BABACAR DIONE and KRISTA LARSON**
Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP)— Riot police in armed personnel carriers fired tear gas and rubber bullets at crowds in Senegal's capital on Monday hours after authorities freed opposition leader Ousmane Sonko following several days of violent protests in one of West Africa's most stable democracies. Even as the 46-year-old politician was released from custody after being indicted on charges of rape and making death threats, fresh clashes erupted between security forces and crowds gathering in anticipation of Sonko's arrival at a public square later in the evening. At least eight people have died since the unrest began last week, according to Amnesty International, marking the worst unrest to hit Senegal in nearly a decade.

Sonko is widely seen as President Macky Sall's greatest potential political challenger in the upcoming 2024 election, and the protests that began



Demonstrators shout slogans in front of riot policemen during a protest against the arrest of opposition leader and former presidential candidate Ousmane Sonko, Senegal, Monday, March 8, 2021.

Wednesday have been accelerated by broader, long-standing grievances with Sall's administration. "The conspiracy has failed. Our client will go home," attorney Cere Cledor Ly told reporters. "We have had this result thanks to the mobilization of the people."

Sonko's supporters had vowed to start three more days of demonstrations on Monday, calling for Sonko's release, and some indicated that they would still push ahead with their efforts. Throngs of boisterous supporters descended on the courthouse downtown

waving Senegalese flags and then made their way to his residence next.

Demonstrators have sought to undermine Sall's business ties with former colonizer France, attacking more than a dozen supermarkets opened by French retailer Auchan. Total gas stations

Associated Press

also have been targeted by the protesters in Dakar. The sight of burned-out cars and boarded-up shops is a rarity in Senegal, which has never suffered the military coups and dictatorships that have destabilized so many of its neighbors in West Africa over the past half-century.

The demonstrations first began Wednesday before Sonko's initial court appearance for questioning on accusations of rape. He was detained on the way to the courthouse and arrested for disturbing public order after hundreds of his supporters clashed with police who were blocking unauthorized protests.

Sonko finished third in the 2019 presidential election with just over 15% of the ballots cast, drawing strong support from younger voters. However, his message of greater economic independence for Senegal has attracted a wider audience amid the financial hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic amid curfews and other movement restrictions. □

Female farmers protest against new Indian agriculture laws

By **NEHA MEHROTRA and RISHI LEKHI**

Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Thousands of female farmers held sit-ins and a hunger strike in India's capital on Monday in protests on International Women's Day against new agricultural laws.

The demonstrations were held at multiple sites on the fringes of New Delhi where tens of thousands of farmers have camped for more than three months to protest against the laws they say will leave them poorer and at the mercy of big corporations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's gov-

ernment says the laws are necessary to modernize agriculture.

About 100 women wearing yellow and green scarves sat cross-legged in front of a makeshift stage in Ghazipur, one of the many protest sites. Holding the flags of farm unions, they listened to female farm leaders speak from the stage and chanted slogans against the laws. At least 17 took part in a day-long hunger strike.

"Women are sitting here, out in the open, in protest, but Modi doesn't care. He doesn't care about mothers, sisters, and daughters. He doesn't care about women. That's clear," said Mandeep Kaur, a female farmer who traveled 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) from Chhattisgarh state to participate in the protests.

Multiple rounds of talks between the government

and farmers have failed to end the stalemate. The farmers have rejected an offer from the government to put the laws on hold for 18 months, saying they won't settle for anything less than a complete repeal. They fear the laws will make family-owned farms unviable, eventually leaving them landless.

Women have been at the forefront of the protests, which have posed one of the biggest challenges to Modi since he took office in 2014. Many accompanied thousands of male farmers who arrived at the protest sites in late November and have since organized and led protest marches, run medical camps and massive soup kitchens that feed thousands, and raised demands for gender equality.

"Today Modi is sending wishes to women across

the country on International Women's Day. Who are these women he is sending wishes to? We are also like his daughters, but he clearly doesn't care about us," said Babli Singh, a farm leader.

International Women's Day, sponsored by the United Nations since 1975, celebrates women's achievements and aims to further their rights.

Women often embody what agricultural experts call an "invisible workforce" on India's vast farmlands that often goes unnoticed.

Nearly 75% of rural women in India who work full-time are farmers, according to the anti-poverty group Oxfam India, and the numbers are expected to rise as more men migrate to cities for jobs. Yet, less than 13% of women own the land they till. □



Members of different women's non governmental organizations shout slogans to mark International Women's Day in New Delhi, India, Monday, March 8, 2021.

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Mexican president says poppy growing being studied

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Monday the government is studying what to do about growers of opium poppies who have been hit by competition from synthetic opioids, suggesting that some sort of legalization scheme might be possible.

Asked about legalizing marijuana production — a bill for which is now before Congress — López Obrador said the question also involves opium poppies grown illegally in some parts of Mexico to make heroin.

"As far as commercializing marijuana and opium poppies, the decision has been made to undertake a thorough study of these crops," López Obrador said.

The government has tried introducing alternative



In this March 4, 2010 file photo, a soldier stands on a poppy field during eradication supervised by the Mexican Army on the outskirts of Morelia, Mexico.

crops, like timber and fruit orchards, in poppy-growing areas, but López Obrador clearly suggested the new study was in addition

to those efforts.

He said farmers in remote mountain communities in Mexico had lost income because traffickers are

poppies and harvest poppy gum needed to process heroin. "We are in the stage of analysis and reflection about what will most benefit Mexico," he said. "There are now unparalleled conditions to do what most benefits Mexico and our people, because the current government is completely free, it is not subordinated to any foreign government."

That was an apparent reference to U.S. pressure to reduce Mexico's production of opium, almost all of which is smuggled into the United States.

Studies of legal opium production have circulated in Mexican government circles since before López Obrador took office in December 2018. □

Associated Press

switching to buying fentanyl from Asia, rather than paying people to grow

Aid group: Syrians could be displaced for years to come

BEIRUT (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of Syrians face continued displacement each coming year that the conflict continues and economic conditions deteriorate, the Norwegian Refugee Council said

Monday. Economic deterioration and hardship are increasingly driving Syrians out of their homes, but the number of displaced will be higher if large military operations resume, accord-

ing to a report by the humanitarian group.

The Syrian conflict, which marks 10 years later this month, has resulted in the largest displacement crisis since World War II, with an estimated 2.4 million people displaced in and outside Syria every year since the war began in 2011, the council said.

Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council Jan Egeland called it a "decade of shame for humanity."

The conflict has left Syria divided and in ruins. Nearly half a million people have been killed, a million children born in exile, and the fate of tens of thousands of people imprisoned or forcibly disappeared remains unknown. □



In this January 28, 2021 file photo, Syrian refugees walk through a camp for displaced muddied by recent rains near the village of Kafr Aruq, in Idlib province, Syria.

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LOCAL



Preparing to receive the second batch of Pfizer vaccines

ORANJESTAD, Aruba – According to planning the second batch of the Pfizer vaccines will be arriving on Aruba, today March 9th, 2021. This batch consists of the second dosage for the ones that already received the first vaccine, who are mainly medical front liners and seniors 60 years and older.

As soon as the vaccine arrive the vaccination process will start immediately with the first 12 persons who received the vaccine last February.

This will take place at Don Bosco Club in Noord. As per planning on March 10th and 11th, 2021 the employees of the Department of Public Health, Dr. Horacio Oduber

Hospital and IMSAN, will also be receiving their second dosage. Family physicians will be receiving the vaccine on Saturday March 13th at Centro Deportivo Libertador Betico Croes in Santa Cruz. If everything goes according to plan starting March 15th, all other citizens will follow.

Everyone who received their first

vaccine will be notified by email or in the Aruba Health app of their second appointment and the location. The Department of Public Health aims to finalize the second round of vaccinations in two to three weeks in order to start preparations for the third batch that is scheduled to arrive by the end of March. □



ORANJESTAD — Annelot Muijers works in Aruba as a Lactation consultant, helping families with one of the most important, beautiful and natural parts of feeding a baby: breastfeeding. She also dedicates her free time in helping the families in need. She is the founder of Foundation Ajudo na Aruba (FANA) which helps hundreds of families with food boxes every week. Today, we would like you to get to know her a little bit more.

How do you balance work and life responsibilities?

Thankfully I have a wonderful husband who takes care of our 5 year old whenever I'm not able to. We are an awesome team together for many years now. My responsibility for my family is the most important one and I will plan anything around that.

Do woman in your profession have a hard time getting promoted?

Unfortunately the profession Lactation consultant isn't recognized by our local government yet, so it's unknown to many on the island. In Europe we see an upcoming trend of Lactation consultants and we couldn't be happier with that. We give preventive care to all mother's for the most natural thing in the world; breastfeeding.

Who inspired you and why?

My son did when I gave birth to him, almost 6 years ago. He brought me back to following my natural instinct and let me help parents with a new beginning of their life. I

Annelot Muijers, FANA

was a MT-member combined with coaching and training employees for many years in a commercial industry and changed my profession after the birth but not my talent.

What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

Don't let anything influence you. Do your thing. Work hard, play hard. Follow your dreams and keep fighting for them every day. You can do anything you want if you put your mind to it. Work hard never killed someone, so keep working. Better to go to bed at night tired from working then from doing nothing!

Do you experience resistance when you are leading men?

No, not at all. Men like to work with me or for me, most of the time. I'm very straightforward, organized and work hard; and the female touch is just an extra tool I can use for defining my work.

What is some of your advice you share with young woman entering a male dominated environment?

Always remember, you are just as good as any man would do the same job. Use your charm, create connection and you will never feel intimidated. Be clear, don't let emotions overflow your rational thinking.

Where will we find you on a Saturday morning at 10am?

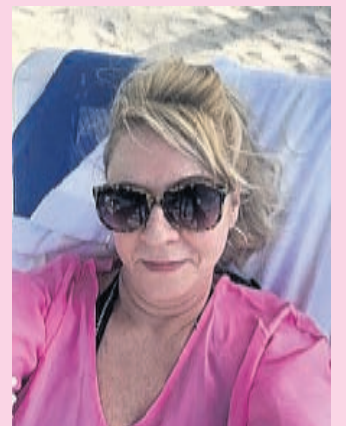
At FANA Fundacion Ajudo na Aruba, in



our warehouse packing families in need. □
hundreds of food boxes for

Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.



Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to:

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Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received an extraordinary story from Susan Tedesco from Saratoga Springs New York. She wrote:

"Aruba is my heaven on earth... after a crazy year of being a nurse during covid keeping elders safe, and watching a dear friend become ill and then recover ...

our annual trip with our "6 pack" of friends was so important. We know how blessed we are to be healthy and together in the most beautiful place on earth. Aruba will keep you safe." □



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Papillon: the butterfly effect of magnificent food

PALM BEACH — Do you remember the film “Papillon” starring Steve McQueen? Papillon restaurant is the island’s example where ‘life imitates art.’ The décor, especially the restrooms, was inspired by the movie. For more than a decade this restaurant has built a reputation with the fusion of classic French cuisine, Dutch and Caribbean flavors. Welcome in the world of wonders where ambiance, taste and service come together and you feel you are being welcomed in the home of the owner and her team.

“We find it really important that our guests have fun; can relax while listening to live music while their taste buds are being tickled by France, The Netherlands and the Caribbean. We offer a unique fusion of dishes and a night not to forget,” says owner Tina. She points out that all Covid-protocol is in place here, they are very keen on hygiene and offer outside dining on a cozy, elegant terrace with social distancing in place and right on the high-rise strip.

Oysters, caviar and wild boar

You are on vacation, life is to enjoy! If you want something special, a different flow than the usual then Papillon is the place to go. Foodies are in heaven here with classic French dishes such as Foie Gras, Frog Legs, fresh Oysters coming in on a weekly basis with KLM, Escargots, Dover Sole à la Meunière flown in from Europe and filleted at the table, Duck Breast seared on the skin, roasted and braised Lamb in Balashi beer and slow braised Wild Boar Shank. Do not leave without trying the exclusive recommendation: Caviar! All of this combined with an extensive wine list from around the world makes Papillon a must-do on your Aruban vacation.

Tina: “Our chef is from Peru and at the moment we have



the renowned guest chef Griet Vanbrabant who worked in Michelin star restaurants like El Bulli in Spain which happened to be the world’s best restaurant for many years and Pujol in Mexico. So this is the time to come over and reserve your table.”

Let the music play!

Twice a week you can enjoy the tunes of live sax player Jairo or the famous Marisela who enchants you with her acoustic performance accompanied by percussion only. The musicians interact with the guests, requests can be send in, the live tunes definitely add to the experience.

Vegetarian vibes present

Impressive vegetarian/vegan dishes are set up especially for the guests by the chef and Meredith from Vegan Aruba. “We offer vegan choices that are really good and tasty. Our daily soup is always vegan too.” What are you waiting for, make sure to pay a visit to this elegant yet laid-back restaurant while on Aruba. You are most welcome!

Papillon Restaurant is located at The Village across the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino and within walking distance of all other major hotels.



Papillon
RESTAURANT

Make your reservation today at:

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Article by Etnia Nativa

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Ceramic Mysticism

Episode XCV - 95

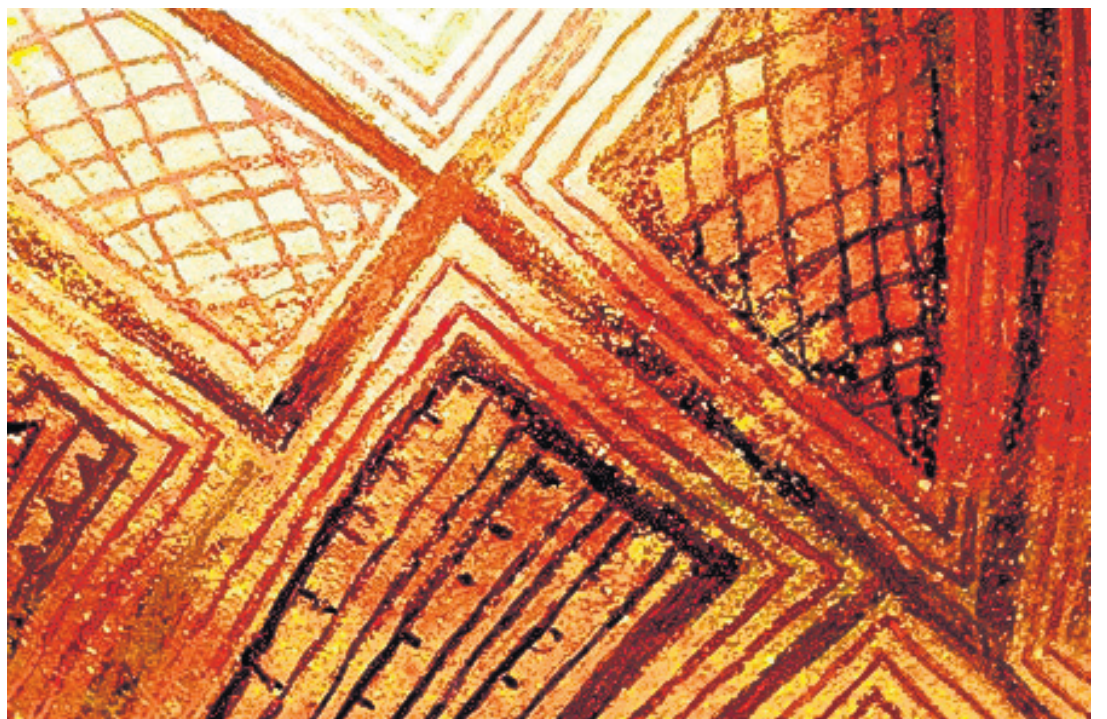
NOORD — For our earth works the “silence” of ceramics is only apparent because nothing is more eloquent for those who know how to seek for those who have the authentic legacy wisdom “from my soul to your soul” without “intermediaries”.

For the ancients of the old world Ars Muta, were for those who proceeded “without words or sounds”, poetry and music being excluded from this category and the one that was harmonic for the ear was considered superior for using sound as a matter.

In this way, the potter's trade, whether working with clay, with iron or with threads, etc. were considered subaltern or mute arts, mutating from one form to another. In this matter, the Church also despised these arts, which with vessels, tools and clothes served men, however the Church only accepted ‘the arts that dialogued with G d’ such as music and poetry.

In the time of Martin Luther it was said that the Devil hated music because it is pleasing to God, therefore the Devil likes the silent arts that work with inferior or carnal materials. By this concept we also understand the distrust that the Church felt for the arts and knowledge that required investigation and fire. As the Church was so influential and the disdain it had for ceramics was such that the craftwork did not even had a name until 1550 when Cipriano Piccolpasso wrote the first book ‘I Tre Libri dell Arte del Vasaio’ (the 3 books of the art of vasiere). Art of the Vasaio since the ceramic was known as ‘art of the vasiere’. Art creating empty storage, but at the same time between the “silent arts” there was a distinction ‘Ars Regia’ that melted precious metals and the ‘Ars Terrea’ or clay with which rustic objects they made glasses and plates that the people used since the nobles wore silver and gold.

Etnia Nativa clay works reflect our energy in mystical silence. Every shape and detail printed on what we create



says something about who we are. Working with clay is a work of self-knowledge where creativity arises through emotion and fluency. Etnia Nativa treats raw clay in the native traditional way. We identify

the best material by hunting for raw clay. For this we distinguish high quality clay from the rest of the earth. Then adding water we purify the material thus contributing to the cleaning process. During this stage the clay is purified and detoxified, dehydrating and thus we begin to mold our forms.

Our attention is focused on the geometric decorations and motives created by natives in the Dabajuroide style. Etnia Nativa understands decoration as a communicative instrument. We trace these designs back on earthworks created by ancestral island inhabitants who used local clay for their ceramic containers and ritual objects.□

To get to know a little more regarding Aruba's and its cultural origins we highly recommend you to book your participation in our cultural encounter session.

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Liz Weston: Common tools can save you time, money on taxes

By **LIZ WESTON** of NerdWallet

Receipts, like memories, tend to fade with time. That's just one reason to digitize and track tax-related information. The right apps and habits can save space, time, money and hassle — but only if you use them.

"Apps should make things easier, not more complicated," says Clare Levison, a certified public accountant in Blacksburg, Virginia. "The definition of a good app is what works for you, not the one that's the trendiest."

USE TOOLS YOU ALREADY HAVE

Apps don't have to be elaborate. The camera on your phone, for example, can capture receipts and other documentation. Levison recommends regularly transferring those images to a designated folder in your photo app to make them easier to find later.

"You don't want those photos mixed in with all your other selfies and whatever," Levison says.

Similarly, you can create folders in your email account to collect tax-related documents. If you're an active investor, for example, you can put your trade confirmations there (or set



This undated file photo provided by NerdWallet shows Liz Weston, a columnist for personal finance website NerdWallet.com.

(NerdWallet via Associated Press)

up a filter so the confirmations are routed there automatically). If you purchase supplies for your business online, a folder can collect emailed receipts.

Another commonplace tool that can be helpful, especially for anyone claiming business expenses or mileage, is a calendar app. These records can help

document meetings with clients, business travel and other potentially deductible events.

"The IRS auditor always asks for a copy of my calendar," says Leonard Wright, a San Diego CPA who's been audited four times.

Calendar records should be kept for at least seven years, which is how long

the IRS typically has to audit you. (There's no time limit if the agency suspects tax fraud, however, so be sure your choice of electronic calendar lets you retain enough history.)

You also need to regularly download monthly statements from your financial institutions, says Kelley C. Long, a CPA and personal finance specialist in Chicago.

If the IRS suspects you've underreported income, it may ask for bank and brokerage statements. If you use a credit card for business or other tax-related purposes, those statements can help support your deductions. While the institutions are required to keep your records for several years, you may have to pay fees to access older statements.

BE SURE YOU'RE STORING FOR THE LONG TERM

Ideally, your computer and phone are already being backed up into the cloud so that you can access your data if the devices are lost, stolen or destroyed. If not, you want to make sure that at least your tax information is regularly transferred to a secure cloud storage system or other safe, off-site location.

The key is to keep infor-

mation safe and accessible, which means choosing electronic over paper wherever possible. Paper is bulky, inefficient and vulnerable to all kinds of disasters, including fire and flood. Ink can fade, particularly on receipts needed to document expenses (credit card or bank statements typically aren't considered enough documentation without the accompanying receipts).

"I usually tell business owners, 'No receipt, then no deduction,'" says Bob Fay, a CPA in Canton, Ohio, who is also a consumer financial education advocate for the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. "This is a short message that sticks with them as they have so much on their plate every day."

But the time the IRS gets around to asking for those receipts, all you may have left is flimsy, unreadable paper if you haven't captured a digital version, Levison says.

Also, paper documents can cost you more.

"People still give their CPAs literally a shoebox," Long says. "What your CPA does then is pay one of their interns to scan all that stuff into their systems and they charge you for that." □

Meme fav GameStop eyes digital shift and stock flies again

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — GameStop took a step toward a more digital future Monday, naming an activist investor to lead company efforts to push more of its business online.

The stock, which has become the focus of federal regulators after online traders challenged more institutional investors and sent shares gyrating wildly, jumped almost 50% in midday trading.

Ryan Cohen, the co-founder of the online pet supply company Chewy, will chair the company's new Strategic Planning

and Capital Allocation Committee.

Cohen took a huge stake in GameStop before the online frenzy over company shares began in January. He has been seen as an agent of change and someone who knows how to make a traditional business more nimble through technology.

Cohen won a seat on GameStop's board early this year about a month after the company revealed plummeting sales in its third quarter.

He has since lobbied to move GameStop's focus away from store locations,

and toward a more online existence.

Cohen's arrival helped to spark a stock buying frenzy in which smaller, online investors challenged massive GameStop short positions held by hedge funds that believed the company was overvalued and in for a rough ride.

A share of GameStop that could be had for less than \$20 at the start of the year, rocketed north of \$480 by the end of January. Trading for more than \$200 on Monday, shares are still up 970% this year.

GameStop, based in Grapevine, Texas, also



In this Jan. 28, 2021 file photo, a pedestrian passes a GameStop storefront in Dallas.

Associated Press

said Monday that it has appointed a chief technology officer, hired executives to lead its customer care and e-commerce functions, and begun the search for a new chief fi-

nancial officer with experience in tech or e-commerce.

Joining the strategic committee with Cohen are Alan Attal and Kurt Wolf, the company said Monday. □

Casting a wide intrusion net: Dozens burned with single hack

By **FRANK BAJAK**

AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — The SolarWinds hacking campaign blamed on Russian spies and the “grave threat” it poses to U.S. national security are widely known. A very different — and no less alarming — coordinated series of intrusions also detected in December has gotten considerably less public attention.

Nimble, highly skilled criminal hackers believed to operate out of Eastern Europe hacked dozens of companies and government agencies on at least four continents by breaking into a single product they all used.

The victims include New Zealand’s central bank, Harvard Business School, Australia’s securities regulator, the high-powered U.S. law firm Jones Day whose clients include former President Donald Trump the rail freight company CSX and the Kroger supermarket and pharmacy chain. Also hit was Washington state’s auditor’s office, where the personal data of up to 1.3 million people gathered for an investigation into unemployment fraud was potentially exposed.

The two-stage mega-hack in December and January of a popular file-transfer program from the Silicon Valley company Accellion highlights a threat that se-



In this Feb. 23, 2021 file photo, SolarWinds CEO Sudhakar Ramakrishna speaks during a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

curity experts fear may be getting out of hand: intrusions by top-flight criminal and state-backed hackers into software supply chains and third-party services. Operating system companies such as Microsoft have long been bull’s-eyes with untold thousands of installations of its Exchange email server being violated globally in the past few weeks, mostly after the company issued a patch and disclosed that Chinese state hackers had penetrated the program.

The Accellion casualties

have kept piling up, meanwhile, with many being extorted by the Russian-speaking Clop cybercriminal gang, which threat researchers believe may have bought pilfered data from the hackers. Their threat: Pay up or we leak your sensitive data online, be it proprietary documents from Canadian aircraft maker Bombardier or lawyer-client communications from Jones Day.

The hack of up to 100 Accellion customers, who were easily identified by the hackers with an online scan, puts in painful relief a digital age core mission at which both governments and the private sector have been falling short.

“Attackers are finding it harder and harder to gain access via traditional methods, as vendors like Microsoft and Apple have hardened the security of the operating systems considerably over the last years. So, the attackers find easier ways in. This often means going via the supply chain. And as we’ve seen, it works,” said Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer of the cybersecurity firm F-Secure.

Members of Congress are already dismayed by the supply-chain hack of the Texas network manage-

ment software company SolarWinds that allowed suspected Russian state-backed hackers to tiptoe unnoticed — apparently intent solely on intelligence-gathering — for more than half a year through the networks of at least nine government agencies and more than 100 companies and think tanks. Only in December was the SolarWinds hacking campaign discovered, by the cybersecurity firm FireEye.

France suffered a similar hack, blamed by its cybersecurity agency on Russian military operatives, that also gamed the supply chain. They slipped malware into an update of network management software from a firm called Centreon, letting them quietly root around victim networks from 2017 to 2020.

Both those hacks snuck malware into software updates.

The Accellion hack was different in one key respect: Its file-transfer program resided on victims’ networks either as a stand-alone appliance or cloud-based app. Its job is to securely move around files too large to be attached to email. Mike Hamilton, a former Seattle chief information security officer now with CI Security, said the trend

of exploiting third-party service providers shows no signs of slowing because it gives criminals the highest return on their investment if they “want to compromise a broad swath of companies or government agencies.”

The Accellion breach’s impact might have been dulled had the company alerted customers more quickly, some complain.

The governor of New Zealand’s central bank, Adrian Orr, says Accellion failed to warn it after first learning in mid-December that the nearly 20-year-old FTA application using antiquated technology and set for retirement had been breached.

Despite having a patch available on Dec. 20, Accellion did not notify the bank in time to prevent its appliance from being breached five days later, the bank said.

“If we were notified at the appropriate time, we could have patched the system and avoided the breach,” Orr said in a statement posted on the bank’s website. Among information stolen were files containing personal emails, dates of birth and credit information, the bank said.

Similarly, the Washington state auditor’s office has no record of being informed of the breach until Jan. 12, the same day Accellion announced it publicly, said spokeswoman Kathleen Cooper. Accellion said then that it released a patch to the fewer than 50 customers affected within 72 hours of learning of the breach.

Accellion now tells a different story. It says it alerted all 320 potentially affected customers with multiple emails beginning on Dec. 22 and followed up with emails and phone calls. Company spokesman Rob Dougherty would not directly address the New Zealand central bank’s and Washington state auditor’s complaints.

Accellion says fewer than 25 customers appear to have suffered significant data theft. □

Conceptis Sudoku
By Dave Green

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| | 9 | 6 | 1 | | | 8 | | 7 |

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Chinese director of 'Nomadland' faces controversy at home

By HUIZHONG WU

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Chloe Zhao's success — she's the first Asian woman and the second woman ever to win a Golden Globe for best director for her film "Nomadland" — has not been met with universal applause in her country of birth.

The Beijing-born filmmaker, now a leading Oscar contender, instead finds the news of her success overshadowed by a nationalist backlash regarding her citizenship and her identity. Censors have removed some social media posts about the film, which has raised questions about whether it will still be released in China.

Over the past week, Chinese web users questioned whether Zhao, who was educated in the U.K. and the U.S., was still a Chinese citizen and if she could be counted as Chinese given a critical comment she made about the country in 2013. Even as some celebrated her win, others dug up two interviews where Zhao said things that they considered an "insult to China."

Now publicity about the film has been removed from social media, and at least two hashtags related to it have been disabled. Searching for the hashtags "Nomadland has a release date" and "No land to rely



In this Jan. 22, 2018, file photo, Chloe Zhao poses for a portrait during the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.

Associated Press

on" (the film's Chinese title) on popular microblog platform Weibo results in a message: "According to the relevant laws, regulations and policies, the page is not found."

A post on Weibo from the government-backed National Art House Alliance of Cinemas that had featured a poster for the film no longer displays the poster.

On Douban, a popular app where many urban Chinese users discuss books,

films and TV shows, the official Chinese poster for the movie as well as a release date in China were deleted Friday, according to Variety. The app's landing page for the movie, with comments and its English-language poster, remain visible.

At the heart of the controversy are two quotes from previous interviews done by Zhao. Online users circulated screenshots from a 2013 interview with Film-

maker magazine where Zhao said, "It goes back to when I was a teenager in China, being in a place where there are lies everywhere." The interview no longer shows the quote, but archived versions of the webpage showed the original.

The second quote came from an interview Zhao did with an Australian website, news.com.au, in December last year where she said "the U.S. is now my coun-

try." Although the news site updated the story on March 3 to say they had misquoted Zhao, and that the article "has been updated to reflect she said (the U.S. is) 'not' her country," the uncorrected version of the story was the one circulating widely on the Chinese internet.

It is unclear if the film will still be released in China. It was slated to be released on April 23, according to Chinese media. The China Film Administration did not immediately respond to phone calls seeking comment.

The online debate has been split. Nationalist commentators say Zhao betrayed her country, calling her "two-faced" and saying she left the country based on her father's wealth as a former CEO of a state-owned enterprise. Other observers called for the debate to remain focused on her movie, which follows the story of a woman who lives in a van after the company that was the economic engine of her town in Nevada shut its doors.

A popular film critic, Chu Mufeng, praised Zhao and her film on his Weibo where he has 3 million followers, noting that "not only was she the first ethnically Chinese female director to win best director, she was also the first Asian woman."

However, one of the top comments underneath his post said: "An American female film director, thanks, don't praise her too much."

Chu responded to the comment, saying, "If an ethnically Chinese chef was great at cooking, would you ask him where he was from? Treat a good movie as if it's a feast, all you need to do is enjoy." □

The Naked Cowboy arrested while performing at Bike Week

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.

(AP) — A Times Square performer known as the Naked Cowboy was arrested on a misdemeanor charge of resisting arrest without violence and cited for panhandling while working a gig at Bike Week in Daytona Beach, Florida. Court records show Robert Burck, 51, who is widely known for wearing only white briefs, boots and a cowboy hat while playing a brightly colored guitar, was arrested Saturday while performing at the annual event on Florida's

Atlantic coast.

Burck is a regular at Bike Week.

The panhandling citation was given after officers saw people tucking dollar bills into Burck's guitar after taking photographs. Burck then refused to follow directions from a police officer and pulled away from her, according to an arrest report.

When the Daytona Beach police officer redirected Burck against a patrol car, the headstock of his guitar broke, according to the arrest report.



Robert Burck, better known as the Naked Cowboy, walks down the middle of Main Street while performing in Daytona, Fla., during the start of Bike Week on Friday, March 5, 2021.

Associated Press

The headstock is the part of the guitar at the end that houses the pegs used for tuning the instrument. He was released from jail Sunday morning following

a first appearance hearing, Volusia County court records show. An attorney for Burck, of Woodside, New York, was not listed on court records. □

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Difficulty Level ★★

3/09

Judge tosses suit over 'race-norming' in NFL dementia tests

By **MARYCLAIRE DALE**

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A federal judge on Monday dismissed a lawsuit that challenged "race-norming" in dementia tests for retired NFL players, a practice that some say makes it harder for Black athletes to qualify for awards that average more than \$500,000. A hearing had been set for Thursday. The judge instead ordered the NFL and the lead lawyer in the overall \$1 billion settlement to resolve the issue through mediation. That process would appear to exclude the Black players who sued. "We are deeply concerned that the Court's proposed solution is to order the very parties who created this discriminatory system to negotiate a fix," said lawyer Cyril V. Smith, who represents ex-players Kevin Henry and Najeh Davenport. "The class of Black former players whom we represent must have a seat at the table and a transparent process."

The demographic factors that doctors consider during testing for dementia often include race. If so, lawyers say, the testing assumes that Black athletes start with worse cognitive functioning than white



Pittsburgh Steelers running back Najeh Davenport (44) sits on the bench during an NFL football game against the Seattle Seahawks in Pittsburgh, in this Sunday, Oct. 7, 2007, file photo.

Associated Press

people — which means it's harder for them to show a deficit. Both Henry and Davenport were denied awards but would have qualified had they been white, according to their lawsuit. Smith hoped

to learn the scope of the problem through discovery as the lawsuit progressed, but the dismissal by Senior U.S. District Judge Anita B. Brody in Pennsylvania means he may never know how many Black players

lost out on payments because of the practice.

He wants race-norming banned in NFL testing going forward, and cases reviewed if it was used in the past. The awards so far average more than \$700,000 for the 203 ex-players diagnosed with moderate dementia and more than \$500,000 for the 365 diagnosed with earlier-stage dementia.

NFL spokesperson Brian McCartney said the league is "pleased with the court's decision" and expects the mediation to address the judge's concerns about the issue.

Christopher Seeger, the lead lawyer for the more than 20,000 NFL retirees covered by the settlement, said the practice is not mandated under the deal but is left the discretion of the testing physicians.

"We have also opposed appeals filed by the NFL, supporting former players and physicians who found the application of such adjustments were inappropriate," Seeger said in a statement.

Brody has managed the litigation since 2011, when the first players sued alleging the NFL had long hidden what it knew about the link between concus-

sions and brain injuries. The judge also steered secret negotiations that led to the surprise settlement of the case — long before discovery or trial — in 2013.

The settlement fund has so far paid more than \$765 million to retired players for neurocognitive problems linked to NFL concussions, including about \$335 million for dementia. Payments are expected to top \$1 billion long before the 65-year settlement plan ends.

The dementia claims have proven especially contentious. Many of them have been denied, often after challenges from the NFL.

Seeger said he has seen no evidence of racial bias in the settlement program. Still, he said Monday, he is sorry it "opened a painful wound" for some.

Henry, who played for the Pittsburgh Steelers from 1993-2000, said his claim was denied although he suffers from headaches, depression and memory loss that leave him unable to hold a job.

Davenport, who played for the Steelers, Green Bay Packers and Indianapolis Colts from 2002-2008, said he suffered more than 10 concussions, including one that broke his eye socket and left him unconscious. □

Djokovic breaks Federer's record for most weeks as ATP No. 1

By **HOWARD FENDRICH**
AP Tennis Writer

Novak Djokovic surpassed Roger Federer for the most weeks at No. 1 in the ATP rankings on Monday. Djokovic is in his 311th week in the top spot, one more than Federer has spent there.

"Big day today," Djokovic tweeted Monday. The 33-year-old from Serbia first reached No. 1 on July 4, 2011, a day after he won Wimbledon for the first time by beating top-ranked Rafael Nadal in the final. Djokovic's ascent represented the first time in nearly 7 1/2 years that a man other than Federer or Nadal was No. 1.

"Any athlete in the world

dreams of being No. 1 of the world. This is something that gives us a lot of motivation," Djokovic said back then, when the ATP marked the occasion by presenting him with a cake shaped like the numeral "1" in the red, blue and white colors of Serbia's flag. "So finally, when you really do it, and when you know that you're the best, it's just an amazing achievement."

Djokovic has gone on to win five titles at the All England Club, along with nine at the Australian Open, three at the U.S. Open and one at the French Open. His total of 18 Grand Slam singles trophies trails only the 20 claimed by Federer

and Nadal for the men's mark.

Djokovic has had five separate stays at No. 1 and finished six seasons there, tying Pete Sampras for the most.

Sampras held the total weeks record of 286 until Federer surpassed him in July 2012. Ivan Lendl stands fourth with 270, and Jimmy Connors is next at 268.

The ATP introduced its computer rankings in 1973. Djokovic's championship at Melbourne Park last month assured him of staying No. 1 at least until this week and claiming sole possession of the record from Federer.

Djokovic called reaching that milestone a "relief"



A billboard celebrating Novak Djokovic is displayed in Belgrade, Serbia, Monday, March 8, 2021.

Associated Press

and said it would allow him to "focus all my attention on Slams, mostly."

"When you are going for No. 1 rankings, you kind of have to be playing the en-

tire season, and you have to be playing well; you have to play all the tournaments," Djokovic said. "My goals will adapt and will shift a little bit." □

Exciting 2nd half awaits NBA, but virus may still have a say

By **BRIAN MAHONEY**
AP Basketball Writer

While LeBron James was largely resting through the All-Star Game, the Brooklyn Nets were adding another piece for a run at his title. With James still near the top of his game and the Nets on top of the league in scoring, it's easy to envision a coast-to-coast NBA Finals when a champion is crowned in July.

But, when most teams resume play Thursday — the same date last season was suspended — the leaders in the Eastern Conference might be doing so without their two best players.

As proven again when Philadelphia's Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons had to sit out the All-Star Game, the coronavirus might still have a say on this season, making uncertainty a sizable obstacle in the title chase. "You're playing every other day. You don't know when you're going to have practice time. You don't know as far as what the restrictions and with COVID and things of that nature if you're going to have all your guys," James said. "So it's very challenging for all teams, not just us."

The bigger problem for the Lakers has been the absence of All-Star Anthony Davis because of a right calf injury. The defending champions have struggled without him, dropping six



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James celebrates during the first half of basketball's NBA All-Star Game in Atlanta, Sunday, March 7, 2021.

Associated Press

of eight to end the first half and falling 3 1/2 games behind surprising West leader Utah.

The Nets have also been without an All-Star, though they've hardly missed Kevin Durant because of the brilliance of James Harden and Kyrie Irving. Blake Griffin agreed to join them Sunday night after the six-time All-Star cleared waivers after securing his buyout from Detroit.

"We're fortunate to be able to add a player of Blake's caliber to our roster at this point in the season," Nets general manager Sean Marks said.

Brooklyn comes out of the

break a half-game behind Philadelphia. Embiid has been a force this season and become a leading MVP candidate, but he and Simmons were ruled out of the All-Star Game on Sunday morning because they got haircuts from a barber who tested positive for COVID-19.

They may not be cleared to return until the weekend, after the Sixers have played their first two games of the second half.

"We start on the road, back-to-back games, with one practice. That's a challenge in itself, right?" Sixers coach Doc Rivers said. "Then, obviously, not

having those guys, that's a lot of points, our two best defenders. So, obviously, it would hurt."

Teams are used to it after a first half in which the unavailability of players and coaches because of health and safety protocols forced 31 games to be called off. For every team, the first big test of the second half is the coronavirus one that will determine who is good to go upon returning from break.

Once that's finished, teams can look ahead to a busy and exciting stretch run. With many clubs bunched in the standings and another play-in tournament

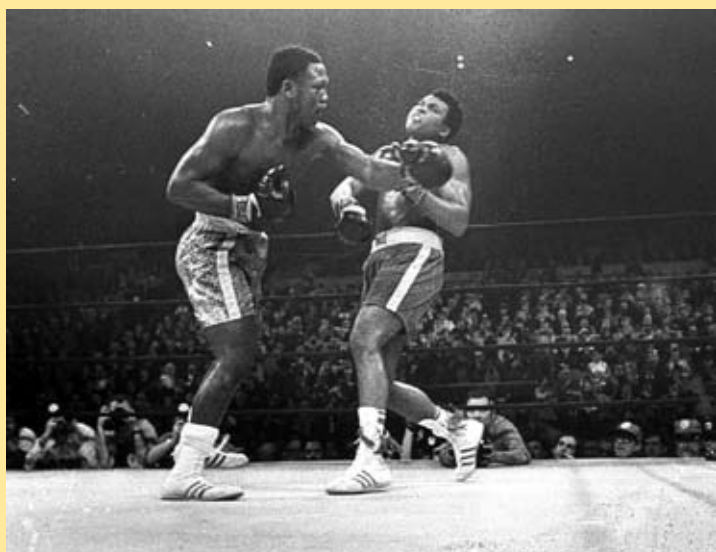
opening up additional paths to the postseason, even teams that weren't as sharp as they hoped in the first half have reason for hope.

That includes teams such as Miami and Boston — last season's Eastern Conference finalists — plus Dallas and Golden State, all at or barely above .500 but perhaps just one hot streak from a nice leap up the standings.

Or maybe Milwaukee, which was running away with the best record in the East last year when the season stopped but has been inconsistent this season, can discover its old form. The Bucks will be fearsome again if Giannis Antetokounmpo shoots anywhere near the way he did in the All-Star Game, when he went 16 for 16 en route to MVP honors.

"I've got to keep working hard and I've got to keep enjoying the game of basketball, and hopefully more important things can come, and hopefully my goal is to be a champion one day," the two-time regular-season MVP said. "Hopefully we can hold the big trophy."

A number of teams could have a shot. The Lakers may have looked like a solid favorite to repeat when the season started, but Davis' health throws that into question. □



In this March 8, 1971, file photo, boxer Joe Frazier, left, hits Muhammad Ali during the 15th round of their heavyweight title fight at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Associated Press

CANASTOTA, N.Y. (AP) — Boxing fans everywhere are celebrating the 50th

anniversary of the first fight between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier.

Boxing HOF celebrates Ali-Frazier every day

Ed Brophy celebrates it every day.

The world's most famous boxing ring, the one in New York City's Madison Square Garden where the Fight of the Century was staged 50 years ago Monday, is the centerpiece of the Boxing Hall of Fame in upstate New York where it's on permanent display.

"It's been a treasured piece here," said Brophy, executive director of the Hall of Fame.

"All of the champions who fought in the ring, when they come back for Hall

of Fame weekend they go into the ring."

On March 8, 1971, the first Ali-Frazier fight proved one for the ages, with Frazier scoring a unanimous decision in a bout that left both fighters battered and bruised.

"Ali-Frazier remains the most-talked-about boxing match ever and one of the most popular sporting events of all time," said Brophy, who remembers listening to the fight on the radio in his bedroom.

"The significance of the bout cannot be over-

stated, and it remains the fight that all other fights are measured against."

Brophy said the ring was initially installed in the first Madison Square Garden in 1922.

It was replaced in 2007 and the Hall of Fame took possession, and when the ring was transported north to a new home it was treated like royalty.

Brophy decided to have the truck driver make a lap along the parade route used each summer to honor new Hall of Fame inductees. □